

QUACKERY, MIRACLE HEALING AND MEDICAL CULTS

(By Robert W. Lovett, Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.)

If one goes backward in the history of civilization, one finds wherever and whenever one looks into it, three persistent parasites clinging to each successive stage of civilization. These are drunkenness, prostitution, and quackery. The State legislates against them; the Church fulminates against them; the better part of the community from time to time rises and decides to exterminate them; but in the Vedas of India, the classics of Greece and Rome, the early records of Egypt and Arabia, and the writings of the Middle Ages, you will find that parasite with which we are for the moment concerned—quackery—described, deplored, and condemned in terms almost of today.

To maintain such vigor, such persistence and such superiority over all the efforts of Church, State, and Society to overcome it, quackery must have deep roots in human nature, and it is of interest to inquire what these roots are.

Causes of Quackery—The first of these lies in human gullibility. It has never been better expressed than by Butler in the following lines from *Hudibras*:

The world is generally averse
To all the truths it sees and hears;
But swallows nonsense, and a lie,
With greediness and gluttony.

The part of the people that can be fooled all the time includes several groups, each of which is fertile soil for the quack: (1) the very ignorant; (2) a peculiar class which seeks the mystical, the occult, and the irregular; (3) an unreasonable class, which espouses an unpopular cause, simply because it is unpopular, without any investigation of its merits, and which finds in the occult mysticism of India a satisfaction which does not come from the contemplation of facts as they are. One might describe them as a submerged class—submerged in the matter of reason and common sense.

The proportion of the gullible class in any community varies, but the estimate of a celebrated quack may be of interest. He was visited by a former play-fellow from his native village, who asked how he had got on so well, adding with the frankness of early friendship, "Thee knowst thee never had no more brains than a pumpkin." The quack took him to the window and bade him count the passersby. When a hundred had passed, the quack asked his visitor: "How many wise men do you suppose were amongst this hundred?" "Mayhap one," was the reply. "Well," returned the quack, "all the rest are mine."

In the history of the past there is no more amusing group of rogues than the famous quacks of the ages. Facile, specious, without conscience, and with unlimited daring, they come down through the years, not depressed by adversity, and always ready to trade on human gullibility."

Types of Quackery—Taking quackery and irregular practice from the time of Hippocrates (460 B. C.), the Vedas of India (600 B. C.), or the time of Galen, the stream flows down through the centuries in five main channels, and in analyzing these it will be interesting to see how little is new in modern cults. These channels are as follows:

1. Nostrums and Proprietary Medicines.
2. Miracle Healing.
3. Mental Healing.
4. Methods of Manipulation.
5. The Amateur Quack.

(1) **Nostrums and Proprietary Medicine**—These are sold in part with criminal intent and in part, probably, by stupid people, who believe in the efficacy of their concoctions. There is, however, no question of the intentions of the man who sold a morphine cure, containing morphia, or an inert

cancer cure, or a disguised cocktail to innocent persons who were appreciative of the subsequent comfortable feeling, now described as "the kick," but ignorant whence it came. The antiquity of this branch of quackery is doubted. So long as medicine consisted of charms, amulets, and incantations, not much could be done in the way of faking imitations; but when remedies became established, so did nostrums.

(2) **Miracle Healing**—The subject of miracle healing is of established antiquity, but whether one view it from the point of view of the past or of today, it is too closely allied with religion to be discussed without the danger of giving offense. It is to be divided into three main divisions: (a) miracles in response to prayer; (b) miracles claimed by Christian Science, such as the cure of cancer; and (3) miracles by the laying on of hands, with or without prayer. The first-named is perhaps best seen in the miracle churches of Lourdes and St. Anne de Beaupre.

(3) **Mental Healing**—In this matter, also, too free discussion is likely to bring one into contact with religious belief, and the subject can be dealt with only superficially. It may be divided into three main groups: Christian Science; The Emmanuel Movement; and Mesmerism. A cure by mental healing implies an action of mind on body, not necessarily a direct miracle with the reversal of Nature's laws, but a healing by the natural mechanism of the body. This is best exemplified in Christian Science, which also figured in the last section; and those interested will find ample literature at their disposal. The Emmanuel Movement was based on the assumption that medical men did not sufficiently use the spiritual and mental aspect of therapeutics in their treatment of the sick, and that this could be supplied from the outside, preferably by the Church. . . . There is plenty of literature concerning it for those interested. One quotation may be given. "Chronic ailments of every sort yield as if by magic to the benign influence of suggestion—headache, toothache, neuralgia, rheumatism, insomnia, epilepsy, hysteria, neurasthenia, alcoholism, morphine, tobacco, stammering, sciatica, St. Vitus' dance, nervous dyspepsia, constipation, goitre, tumors, paralysis, etc."

(4) **Methods of Manipulation**—Bone-setting, osteopathy, and chiropractic. All other forms of irregular healing have at the present time largely given place to those by methods of manipulation. Of the three manipulative sisters, bone-setting, osteopathy, and chiropractic,

Bone-setting—Reference to manipulative treatment akin to bone-setting is found as early as the days of Homer, and it is probable that its origin is even earlier than this, although actual record of it seems to be lacking. Among the other camp followers of medicine were the gymnasts or Iatroleptes, who, besides exercises, practiced inunction of the body. They were also, it would appear, bone-setters, and were naturally led to give first aid in all accidents and in many diseases, and to advise as to diet and regimen.

Osteopathy on analysis seems to be bone-setting, not much modified, but to which has been added a fantastic and unproved pathology to account for the claimed efficiency of its methods. An interesting quotation may be taken from one of the standard osteopathic text-books: "There is no doubt in my mind as to the similarity existing between the conditions which were recognized by so-called 'bone-setters' and those which have formed the basis for the successful advance of osteopathy. The difference lies principally in the educational qualifications." After reading the osteopathic theory of disease one comes almost to admire old Mr. Hutton, who openly announced that he neither knew nor cared to know anything about anatomy. It is, therefore, interesting to examine the tangible evidence as to this (osteopathic pathology)

which has so far been offered. Three varieties of proof are available:

1. In the dissecting room and at autopsy: The claim is made that dissections of bodies reveal anatomical lesions associated with disease of organs; these observations have been made at osteopathic colleges, but such changes have not been observed in the dissecting rooms of the medical schools of the world. The claim that these "lesions" are found is, therefore, apparently not substantiated by sufficient evidence, which is eagerly awaited.

2. The X-ray: It is claimed that the X-ray has frequently shown an osteopathic lesion, which disappeared after reduction. The experience of the medical profession is otherwise. It has only to be remembered how slight a distortion in the line of the shadow will produce the appearance of a displacement in an X-ray, and that the reading of an X-ray differs greatly. I can only state that in my personal experience in one or two instances I have been privileged to have taken in my own X-ray room, under fixed conditions, radiographs before and after the so-called "reduction" of a lesion by others. The closest analysis of the radiographs before and after failed to show the slightest change in the position.

3. Animal Experimentation: Bulletin V, of the A. T. Still Research Institute of Chicago, Ill., published in 1917, is a contribution to the study of the effects of experimental lumbar "lesions." "Lesions" were produced by forcible subluxation in which it is amusing to note that great care was taken to prevent any injury to the articular tissues. "Lesions" were also produced by gentle taps near the spinous processes of the selected vertebrae. These animals were then studied. So far as one can judge from the decidedly imperfect X-rays reproduced as evidence, a partial fracture of the spine was not uncommon. Various organs were then studied with regard to the effect of these lesions, but the work seems loose and very discursive, and is far from convincing. In this experimental work two especially long steps are taken by making assumptions which will demand better proof before animal experimentation can be of value. These assumptions are: (1) The frequency of osteopathic lesions of a demonstrable character existing in human beings; (2) that such lesions can be duplicated in quadrupeds by wrenching, tapping and manipulating their spines.

Chiropractic—When we come to the third and youngest, and least reputable of the three manipulative sisters, Chiropractic, we take a definite step downward. The Journal of Osteopathy speaks of chiropractors as "fakers," but the Supreme Court of Montana handed down a decision that "chiropractic is nothing more nor less than osteopathy under another name." The basis of the so-called "science" is the so-called "chiropractic subluxation" of a vertebra. This means a slight or partial separation between the articulations so that they are not exactly together. When a subluxation occurs there begins a pressure on the nerve coming through the intervertebral foramina and this shuts off the flow of life force going through that nerve and acts as a rheostat or booster to the current going through it. Chiropractically speaking, disease is simply a register as to the amount or excess of current that an organ receives at the end of the nerve: Slight pressure "steps up" the current; heavy pressure paralyzes. One would, therefore, adjust for cancer or gonorrhoea. This theory of disease is too fantastic, crude and unsupported to warrant discussion, but it spells danger to the community, and to what lengths it will go can only be appreciated by reading the testimony of B. J. Palmer in the Wisconsin courts. Chiropractors claim that they are licensed to practice in twenty-two States. The Universal Chiropractors' Association guarantees the graduate "the legal right to practice; or we will, through process of the law,

know the reason why. . . . The fact that chiropractors are practicing in every State of the Union, and that the U. C. A. has not failed to protect them speaks for itself." In Massachusetts they have no standing whatever. The escape for the chiropractic in this State is to register as a masseur, but to pose as a chiropractor. If he is caught, he has only to claim that he is practicing massage. It seems not unlikely that a definite attempt will be made in this State to establish a licensing board for chiropractic.

(5) **The Amateur Quack**—The last and fifth division of the irregular practitioner has not been, up to this time, sufficiently appreciated. The amateur quacks outnumber all the others put together. They are active in every community. They are actuated by altruistic motives and they do only a moderate amount of harm. The prevalence of these amateurs in medical matters is not new.

If any one of you will do your knee up in a ham splint and bandage, and take a pair of crutches and go three or four miles in the trolley cars, you will find out two things: The desire of everybody to be considerate and to make room for the invalid to sit down, and the curiosity, unconcealed, but outspoken, of many of your fellow-passengers as to the cause, history, and progress of the ailment. People who have never heard of Mr. Howells' well-known man, in Chicago, who made his fortune by minding his own business, are eager to offer advice. You may give them whatever diagnosis you like, varying from a sprained knee to sarcome, or fractured patella, and you will find that they have either had it themselves, or had a relative or friend who had it, and the treatment by which he was cured was something entirely different from yours, unless the result was fatal, in which case you will be informed of that. The number of remedies proposed is legion, and it is surprising to find that more people are not unsettled by this sort of thing.

Percentage of Hospitals Admitting Osteopaths—

Question 1 of the Round-Table Session of the American Hospital Association's annual meeting was, "What percentage of the hospitals in the association allow osteopaths to care for patients in the hospital; and under what conditions, if any, are they allowed?"

The answer, given by Dr. W. P. Morrill, Shreveport (La.) Hospital: "By the questionnaire method the following figures were obtained in relation to the percentage of hospitals which allow osteopaths to care for their patients: 83 1/3 per cent do not admit them; 11 1/3 per cent admit them under the supervision of M. D.'s; 3 per cent permit them to practice independently." Some extremely amusing and illuminating comments accompanying the questionnaire replies were read by Dr. Morrill. One institution admits osteopaths if the patient will sign a paper assuming full responsibility; another admits but "does not encourage" them; one writes, "They shall not pass."—The Modern Hospital.

Women's Foundation for Health, Inc.—A large, enthusiastic, and apparently earnest body of women and women's organizations of the United States have been brought together under the above title. According to the literature: "The Women's Foundation of Health, Inc., is a co-operative body of leading women's organizations formed with the purpose of correlating the health activities of the various organizations in a program emphasizing the positive phase of health." The objectives as published are: "To establish the conviction that health is generally attainable through individual effort and responsibility," and "To establish the conviction that mental health is as procurable as physical health." The present board of nine trustees contains the names of two physicians—Dr. Anna L. Brown and Dr. Martha Tracy. Headquarters of the foundation are at 43 East Twenty-second Street, New York City.